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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
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RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY 3938
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 2147
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 6694
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RHMCSUU/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 000291

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: INDIAN FOREIGN SECRETARY RAO ON 2/13 PUNE BOMBING
AND INDO-PAKISTAN TALKS

Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Uzra Zeya. Reasons: 1.4
(B, D).

¶1. (C) In a February 14 telephone conversation with Foreign Secretary Rao, Ambassador Roemer expressed his condolences for the February 13 terrorist bombing in Pune and offered USG assistance as appropriate. Rao thanked the Ambassador and condemned the attacks as "typical senseless violence" by terrorists. Turning to India's proposal for talks between the Foreign Secretary and her Pakistani counterpart now set for February 25, Rao said she hoped talks would begin on that date. Recognizing the importance of the dialogue, she thanked the Ambassador for the USG's strong support for Indo-Pakistan talks and his offer of any assistance needed to see them move forward. Acknowledging that "a week in India/Pakistan politics was an eternity," Rao said that nothing could be completely counted on and flagged rumblings from the opposition BJP against the talks. The Ambassador stressed that the terrorists' aim was to disrupt discussions and increase the level of tensions. Rao echoed External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna's observation that terrorists were "the dark forces of evil" who aim to control the process. The Ambassador underlined USG offers of support and said this incident illustrated the need for India and the United States to work together closely on counterterrorism issues.

¶2. (C) Comment: The PM's move to reengage Pakistan was always going to be risky and controversial; the reaction to the Pune bombing only underlines the fragility of the talks. However, so far, at least, there is no sign from the GOI that it is backing away from its plans. The GOI public approach has been measured, avoided speculation on possible perpetrators, and has not pointed fingers at Pakistan. While FS Rao is right to point out that much can happen between now and February 25, the GOI's interest in preventing terrorists from exercising a veto over the talks should be strong enough to let them go forward, a point we will continue to make in further high-level engagement with GOI leaders.
ROEMER